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~~TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE~~  
FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

SUMMARY NOTES OF 547th NSC MEETING  
February 8, 1965; 10:30 A.M.  
(with Congressional Leaders)

The President asked Secretary McNamara to begin the meeting by reporting on the results of the U.S. raid in North Vietnam which took place yesterday against the Dong Hoi barracks.

Secretary McNamara said that bomb damage photographs indicated ten buildings were hit, two damaged, others burning. He described the raid as being moderate to good. He also reported on the air strike carried out by the South Vietnamese Air Force, with U.S. assistance, against the Chap Le army barracks. He said there were very good results from this strike based on reports received so far.

Acting Secretary Ball spoke of the effect of the North Vietnamese attack on Soviet Premier Kosygin's visit to Hanoi. He said it may be that Soviet Union was not aware of plans for the North Vietnamese attack. If so, they may have been mouse-trapped by Hanoi. If they had known of the attack, the Russians might not have sent Kosygin to Hanoi. The North Vietnamese action has put the Russians on the spot. We have talked to the Russians in an effort to explain why we had to retaliate as we did. Our hope is that they will understand why we acted as we did, at least to the extent of being annoyed by the North Vietnamese action.

Mr. Ball informed the group that we had sent to the Secretary General of the United Nations a letter stating our case. The purpose of this letter was to preempt any effort of a UN member to call a UN Security Council Meeting to discuss the situation in Vietnam. We are quite ready to explain our case to the Security Council but we wish to control the circumstances of that discussion. He recalled when we had proceeded in a similar manner following the Desoto Patrol incident in the Gulf of Tonkin.

Ambassador Thompson summarized his conversation with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin. He said he had told the Ambassador that we had cancelled a proposed patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin to be certain that no embarrassing incident would take place during Mr. Kosygin's visit to Hanoi. However, we had been forced to react when the Viet Cong attacked our personnel, wounding a number of men and killing seven. (Summary of the Thompson-Dobrynin conversation is attached, Tab A.)

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The President asked all of those present to preserve the secrecy of the various ways we communicate with the Russians. He said he had authorized the discussion with Ambassador Dobrynin because of the importance of conveying our views to the Russians. He did not want such conversations to become known to the public.

The President then summarized our present position as follows:

1. Last December we had approved a program of further pressure against North Vietnam but did not initiate actions for the time being, in order to allow Ambassador Taylor a period of time in which we hoped he would be able to assist the Vietnamese in creating a stable government in Saigon. In addition, we delayed action pending the time when U.S. dependents could be evacuated from the area.

2. We are now ready to return to our program of pushing forward in an effort to defeat North Vietnamese aggression without escalating the war.

3. We were surprised by the attack on our personnel at Pleiku but we had to respond. If we had failed to respond we would have conveyed to Hanoi, Peking and Moscow our lack of interest in the fate of the South Vietnamese government. In addition, the South Vietnamese would have thought we had abandoned them.

4. There is a bad governmental situation in Saigon but it is our hope that current U.S. action may pull together the various forces in Saigon and thus make possible the establishment of a stable government. He concluded by saying that U.S. dependents would be out of Saigon in about two weeks.

Representative Ford asked if he had understood correctly that we had cancelled a patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin because of Kosygin's presence in Hanoi.

The President replied that we had cancelled the patrol because we wanted to avoid any appearance of provocation while Kosygin was in North Vietnam. Despite this action on our part, the Viet Cong had carried out an attack which was highly provocative to us.

McGeorge Bundy then summarized the findings and recommendations of his report to the President. (A copy of the report is attached. Tab B).

The President then read a battle damage report of the attack on the Chap Le barracks and on the Dong Hoi target. (The document from which he read is attached. Tab C)

In response to the President's question, General Wheeler spoke of the difficulty of insuring the security at the Pleiku base. He described the dropping of mortars and went into the details with respect to what he described as a skillful sneak attack. He said the only real security for an airfield is full combat control of the perimeter two miles out from the field. In guerrilla warfare such as exists in Vietnam, there are no rear areas. He called attention to the fact that we must rely on the Vietnamese to carry out the security task because our forces are there as advisers and are insufficient in number to insure security of such an area as the Pleiku airfield.

Further details of the Vietnamese attack were given by General Goodpaster who, as a member of the Bundy group, had just returned from the area and had discussed the attack with those who were engaged.

The President added that we were up against highly skilled guerrilla fighters. He said there is no way to insure against such attacks as that which occurred at Pleiku short of sending a very large number of U.S. troops to Vietnam.

Representative Ford asked whether McGeorge Bundy was now recommending the program proposed last December.

The President responded by saying that Mr. Bundy had brought back from Saigon the views of our country team there. These views had been discussed with the President's advisers and an agreed recommendation had been made to the President.

Representative Ford asked whether the program involved additional U.S. personnel and additional financial assistance.

The President replied that our present needs are met. If the response to our action is larger than we expect, we will then of course make a request for a larger amount of U.S. military assistance and will need additional personnel.

McGeorge Bundy said that events had forced us to act as we have--that action had not been based on his group's findings. A rolling consensus as to the proper course of action had developed after he returned to Washington from Saigon.

Representative Ford asked whether all we intended to do was to react to Viet Cong provocations.

The President replied that all Viet Cong actions did call for a response but we did not intend to limit our actions to retaliating against Viet Cong attacks.

Senator Dirksen asked what effect on the morale of our forces in Vietnam and on South Vietnamese government itself would result from our decision to move our dependents out of Saigon.

Secretary McNamara replied that our action would be explained on the basis of our intention to clear the decks for further action rather than as an indication of our intention to retreat.

Senator Dirksen asked what the effect would be if the United States pulled out of South Vietnam.

McGeorge Bundy replied that if we pulled out there would be a strong feeling in the nations of Southeast Asia that we had failed to carry out our policy of assisting the Vietnamese to continue as an independent state. The consequences in Southeast Asia of our pull-out would be very large. In other parts of the world, the effect would also be very serious, even to the extent of affecting the morale in Berlin.

Senator Dirksen asked Director McCone what the reaction of the Chinese Communists would be.

Mr. McCone said we did not know as yet, but he recalled that Peking's reaction to the Gulf of Tonkin incident had been minor.

The President said that the Congressional Resolution on Vietnam plus the legal power of the Presidency made it possible for him to carry out at a manageable level an effort to deter, destroy and diminish the strength of the North Vietnamese aggressors and to try to convince them to leave South Vietnam alone. He said that the views of a few Senators could not control his actions. He intended to use the Congressional Resolution carefully but effectively. He repeated his view that we now have in Saigon the best possible people. Ambassador Taylor had his pick of personnel throughout the world. It is true that we have real trouble in Vietnam but we are not going to pull out.

Senator Dirksen asked what use could be made of the information which he had heard during the meeting.

The President replied that he had instructed McGeorge Bundy to talk to the press, telling them as much as he possibly could without affecting the national interest. He referred to the outstanding TV presentation made yesterday by Secretary McNamara and Acting Secretary Ball. He said there was very little information which the government had which was not already in the public domain. We cannot say we are seeking to broaden the war, or say that we are going to withdraw. We can say that if the Vietnamese will cease their aggression, we will pull out. He asked those present not to discuss publicly our military actions but he said they could say that our actions would be kept at a manageable level.